

Favorite Christmas Story

by Mike Tucker *

Dear Friends,

This Christmas, I asked Gayle to share one of her favorite Christmas stories. It is a story we've shared with friends and loved ones through the years. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

It was going to be the best Christmas ever! I was six years old, it was Christmas Eve, and our family was traveling to Kansas to spend the holiday with my favorite aunt and uncle. As we drove along my three siblings and I played games to pass the time and asked Mom and Dad at least a hundred times, "Are we there yet?"

I could hardly wait to get to my aunt's and uncle's house. This was the first time we would spend Christmas with relatives, and everything was going to be perfect. Finally, we arrived in Kansas City and pulled into their driveway just as giant flakes of snow began to fall. A white Christmas! Perfect!

My aunt was waiting at the door with open arms, and there were hugs and kisses all around as we piled out of the car and into the warm, fragrant house. A moment later, four children were frozen in awe as we caught sight of the biggest, most beautiful Christmas tree we had ever seen. It was covered with lights and tinsel and ornaments, and it was *tall* – so tall that the halo on the angel tree topper brushed the ceiling. Christmas trees at our house had never looked like that!

Under the tree, there were lots and lots of presents. My uncle smiled at our delight and seemed as excited as we were when he showed us four large, beautifully wrapped presents – one for each of us. To my surprise and delight, mine was huge! It was the biggest of all – the largest gift under the tree.

Later, the family gathered around the fireplace to sing carols and read the story of Jesus' birth. The shiny packages glistened in the lights from the Christmas tree. I could only imagine what wonderful thing that might be in that big box. I thought my aunt and uncle were great, but on top of that, I knew they owned their own hardware store, and in those days, hardware stores sold... toys! Now it was confirmed. This *would* be the best Christmas ever.

Bright and early on Christmas morning, the kids jumped out of bed, ready to open the presents. We were sure we were being tortured when the adults decided to have breakfast first. Finally, the time came to open the gifts.

My uncle passed them out, and ribbons and bows began to fly. I saved my special gift until last, then I started to tear the paper away from the giant box. I struggled with the tape on the lid, but soon had it open. I had never felt so excited.

I pulled out the packing paper that was stuffed in the top and looked inside. There was some cardboard. I tossed that aside and looked deeper in the box. More wadded paper. I thought this must be a fragile gift, with all this packing material.

Again, I pulled the paper out and looked in, my head disappearing inside the big box. Maybe there was something toward the bottom that had to be assembled, I thought. But nothing seemed to appear. I continued to pull out more and more wadded paper until I reached the bottom of the box. It was empty. There was no gift.

I couldn't understand what had happened. My brother and sisters had their gifts. Was it a trick? Why would they do that? I thought this was going to be perfect, but it wasn't, and now I didn't know what to do. I shrunk back in confusion and disappointment and tried to disappear, hoping no one would notice.

But someone did notice. My uncle, enjoying the happiness of the children, was watching all the time. He saw my brother open his Tonka truck and my sisters with their presents. Then he saw me and realized something wasn't right.

Thinking I didn't like my present, he came over and quietly asked what was wrong. "It was empty," I said.

"Empty? It can't be empty. I brought it home myself," he said.

"It's empty," I said.

Now, *his* head disappeared in the box as he tried to find the gift and figure out what was going on. Sure enough, the box was empty. It appeared that an employee at the hardware store had accidentally pulled an empty box from the storeroom; the toy had been put on the shelf for display. My uncle was so chagrined.

"We'll fix this," he said. "You and I will just make a little trip down to my store, and you can pick out any toy you want." Suddenly, my disappointment turned to joy! Not only would I get a present, but I would have a special trip with my uncle. And I would get to pick out the very best gift.

That is a Christmas I'll never forget. It was perfect after all.

Sometimes we think we have our lives so well planned out. Everything will be perfect! And then the boxes turn out to be empty. We shrink back in confusion, wondering how things could turn out this way.

But we have a Father who tenderly watches over us and sees us as we open the empty boxes that life can bring – shiny boxes we thought held everything we wanted.

When I met Jesus, I realized that His gifts are the only "perfect" gifts. From Him we have received the gifts of the Babe of Bethlehem, the life, death and resurrection of the

Carpenter, and the marvelous gift of eternal life. One day soon we will receive the gift of eternity in His presence when He returns in clouds of glory!

This Christmas season it is my prayer that your Christmas will be perfect. If it's centered in Jesus, it will be. Merry Christmas!

Love,
Mike

* Mike Tucker is the speaker/director of Faith for Today.
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Faith Moment
December 23, 2013